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ABSTRACT

The American Educational System has proven itself to be responsive to the changing educational demands of a changing society. In the 1960's, these demands were for hard, rigid, scholarly curricula, geared to science, engineering, and the pursuit of the doctorate degree. In the 1970's, the educational system also met the demands of renewed interest in the social and behavioral sciences. This kind of adaptability and responsiveness is also needed in the field of teaching. Teachers have been criticized for placing learning political skills above developing teaching effectiveness; for their lack of concern with the importance of life experiences; for placing too much emphasis upon subjects taught rather than objectives desired; for using grades too heavily as motivators for study; for overburdening students with assignments; for lack of imagination, and flexibility in the use of time, tools, and methods; and for ignoring average students in favor of promising ones. It is the responsibility of the college to help their faculty to teach and be effective. Possible alternatives include bringing legislators, scientists, literary figures, and artists to meet with students; developing techniques for planning course objectives in terms of outcomes and experiences; developing "know how" to use materials for self-instruction by student; continual evaluation of teaching; and expansion of support staff. (MB)

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SOME REASONS WHY TEACHING "GOES WRONG"

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The output of printed material about education is inexhaustible and unending. We read about new directions, new horizons, relevancy, student unrest, educational technology, hardware, software, programmed instruction, new math, new English, revolution, transition, strikes, sanctions, independent study, travel abroad, tenure, merit, black studies, ethnic studies, student rating of teachers, advanced placement, grades-no grades, and an endless list of challenging subjects.

In the midst of this overwhelming flow of comment very little is said about the most important aspect of education which is, of course, teaching. While teaching may not be the oldest profession, it should be the most respected of all arts. Teaching has, in fact, fallen into a sad state of disrepute. "Don't call me teacher! I am an educator or, even better, a professor--full professor, of course."

This paper will attempt to answer three questions:

1. Has American Education Been Adaptable?
2. Why Do Teachers Fail?
3. What Can the College Do to Improve Teaching?

Has American Education Been Adaptable?

Before specific comments are made regarding some of the "Achillean Heels" of teaching it is important to recognize, in passing, that education has been responsive to the demands of the American public--at least, to those demands they supported financially.

In this respect the pendulum has indeed swung very far. In the 1930's Abraham Flexner and others complained that too few American universities were real institutions of higher education. He claimed that they were dominated by the mere teaching function, which was too concerned with the teaching of boys

(the undergraduates) rather than with the important task of educating men (training of scholars in graduate schools).[1]

The chant was spurred by Russian scientific accomplishments which threw the American public into a frenzy of vitriolic foreboding and vicious criticism of American education. Comparisons were made between Ivan and Johnny, with Johnny always coming out "second best." In one of his last public addresses, President Eisenhower called the education lag between American and Soviet schools "our most pressing national problem."[2]

Since then, our education system has, in fact, outdone itself in meeting the demands of citizens for hard, rigid, scholarly curriculum, geared to science, engineering, and the pursuit of the Ph.D. The market is loaded with the product of this venture but, alas, our accomplishments have not brought happiness.

We faced the 1970's with a student population that guided the curriculum by a renewed interest in the social studies and behavioral sciences. Riots in the ghettos and on campuses, problems of poverty in modern affluent America, high priority of war, and abuses of our physical and social environment have been influential in the development of a sincere concern about social action with a dedication to change things as they exist in our country today. This mood set the stage for new directions in education--now and, without doubt, the future. Education has been responsive to this demand. Not to be lost in this process is the explosive potential for social disorganization and upheaval. Will the future bring renaissance with improvement or will the future bring regression to a lower order?

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[1]Alexander Flexner, "American Universities as Institutions of Learning," ed Walter M. Kotschnig and Elined Prys (London: Oxford Press, 1932, pp. 121-124.

[2]Jack Webb, "1970 Schools Facing Paradoxes," Daily Breeze, January 4, 1970, p A1.

Why Do Teachers Fail?

We in America's educational instututions have demonstrated tremendous capacity to solve scientific and technological problems. An even greater challenge to educators has been to have the social awareness, or consciousness, not only to attack the problems of our society but to teach others to do so in an orderly and constructive manner.

The modern teacher is victim of an age of specialization--a time when knowledge has become so great that it is difficult to know well even a narrow or special area. In spite of this, man is apt to overstate his great achievements and to underestimate his limitations. As Earl Pullias has stated, "Modern man seems to be in danger of such arrogance. Often he speaks of conquering Nature when he better might speak of understanding and cooperating with her."[3]

Teaching has always needed improvement and always will. It appears that one of the major criticisms of higher education, as so aptly stated by William Arrowsmith, is that, "The scholar has disowned the student--that is, the student who is not a potential scholar--and the student has reasonably retaliated by abondoning the scholar . . . By making education the slave of scholarship the university has renounced its responsibility to human culture . . . It has disowned in short what teaching has always meant; a care and a concern for the future of men."[4]

So what?--everyone knows that the community college is a teaching institution! Our interests, first and always, are in teaching--the teaching of all students. If this is true, why then do we worry so much about our personal status in

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[3]Earl V. Pullias and Aileene Lockhart, Toward Excellence in College Teaching, Wm. C. Brown Co. Inc., Dubuque, Iowa, 1963, p. 109.

[4]William Arrowsmith, "The Future of Teaching," Improving College Teaching, ed Calvin B. T. Lee, American Council on Education: Wash. D.C., 1967, p. 59.

the scheme of higher education? Can we honestly say that we are not subject to "looking up" to the university and secretly "wishing" we were more like "them"? Haven't we been guilty of letting "them", four-year colleges and universities, be the pattern for much of what we are? It has been stated that the new institution has the best opportunity to learn from the past and to be truly innovative. How innovative have we really been as we have developed our new or our old community colleges?

Becoming a superior teacher is not an easy task. Even the great scientist, Gregor Mendel, who discovered the laws of genetics, failed his teacher's examination four times. Finally, in desperation, he went into the field of administration! From this statement please do not infer that administration is a "bed of roses." I know you could elaborate in detail on the shortcomings of administrators. With this in mind, let me mention some of the specific criticisms made of <u>some</u> teachers.

1. On the scale of importance, far too often the new teacher places the learning of political skills above that of developing teaching effectiveness. He places committeemanship above teaching skill.

2. Too frequently we teachers have burning concern about the fifteen hours a week spent with the student in class and too little concern about the importance of other living experiences in the laboratory of life. An increasing number of institutions and community colleges are expanding the use of off-campus and out-of-class activities as part of their programs.

3. Too much emphasis is placed upon the subjects taught rather than upon the objective desired. The notion that the professor is a walking encyclopedia and that the student is to absorb information is a throwback to times when books were scarce and costly and when oral transmission of culture was necessary.

4. Often, teachers lean too heavily upon grades as the motivator for study. Students are aware that they can obtain good grades and an inferior education. They also fear the receiving of poor grades resulting in the denial of higher education. Teachers have a sincere responsibility to be temperate and humane in their use of grades.

5. Teachers are accused of inconsiderately "overburdening" students with assignments--forgetting, or not caring, that the student has responsibilities to other courses. (Many colleges are guilty of making too many requirements and not having enough cohesion in their curriculum.)

6. Teachers are accused of failing to plan and failing to be imaginative and flexible in the use of tools, time, and methods of approach.

7. Teachers concentrate on the "highly promising" students, ignoring the larger number of "average" students who need the instructor's assistance too.

These are a few from a long list of charges made against the teacher. Whether you are guilty or innocent of one, none, or of several of these charges, should be of deep concern to you.

What Can the College Do to Improve Teaching?

The American "community college" along with the people who staff it has democratized higher education. It might very well be that our efforts in educating those who otherwise may be society's "losers," in addition to a small group of social and economic elite "winners," will be the salvation of higher education if not our nation.

If this role is to continue so that the community college will function as an educational system for all who can benefit from the experience of higher education rather than as a scholastic establishment serving an aristocratic and/or the intellectual elite, the college must dedicate itself toward a consciousness for upgrading teaching. It cannot be a contributor to human waste and destruction resulting from the inept teacher.

John E. King has stated the situation very well, "It really cannot be expected that a great graduate school can produce a person who will know how to teach. Even doctors, engineers and lawyers have to learn how to be doctors and lawyers and engineers after they start the profession."[5] The college has an obligation to help all faculty, young and old, to teach and be effective at as high a level as possible. A few ways by which this is being accomplished are

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[5]Calvin, B. T. Lee, op. cit. p. 96.

listed as follows:

1. An increasing number of colleges are making some form of off-campus experience a part of the program. For example, in its program, VOICE, of El Camino College, which stands for Volunteers Organized in Community Experience, El Camino College has several hundred students doing volunteer service mainly with social agencies in the community. Enthusiastic and dedicated teachers and administrators and a college that is willing to support this concept have made the program possible.

2. Colleges must bring the world to the campus by having legislators, scientists, literary figures, and artists on campus to meet with students. The teacher must have the wisdom and humility to take his classes to such performances if it is appropriate to his discipline, and the college should not only encourage but promote such activity.

3. Teachers and administrators are working diligently to develop techniques for planning the objectives of the course in terms of first, desired outcomes, and second, experiences from which learning will likely result. The hope is to direct emphasis, particularly in the liberal arts, more to objectives desired than to the subject materials taught.

4. The college must provide the materials and must help the teacher develop the "know how" to use materials for self-instruction by the student, i.e., films, tapes, and programs for learning. The teacher will move away from repetitively and routinely conducting classes where material is predigested and regurgitated for the students. Individual and group conferences, advising--as to the source of materials, presentation of seminars, the conducting of investigations, and team teaching will become more prominent. Colleges will have more larger and smaller classrooms and fewer medium sized classrooms with considerable technology available.

   As audio-visual replacements are provided for many of the information-giving functions now performed by the teacher, care must be taken to ensure that faculty time "won" by mechanization, in turn, is given to the students. Otherwise, such change should be resisted.

5. The evaluation of teaching with the purpose of upgrading instruction must be improved. Student evaluation and evaluation by peers, from both the home campus and from other institutions; must be encouraged and implemented.

6. Community colleges are finding rich sources of technicians, teacher aides, graders, and other skilled help in the community. The expansion of support staff for the teacher should demand considerable attention.

These and other attempts to help colleges better serve the teacher must be given more attention. Improving the environment of teaching is an institutional responsibility. But, in the final analysis, the motivated teacher who has cast aside fear of status and laziness, and who has acquired the "experimental spirit" will be the one who becomes the master teacher. This is the teacher who is comfortable with students, who is secure in his self image, and who is willing to admit a wrong or to say "I don't know but let's find out." This is the teacher who is in harmony with the student and with objectives that are meaningful to both the student, to himself, and to society.